

Sail Away

Co-skipper of the Audi Ultra racing yacht Tan Wearn Haw is hooked on the thrill of finding adventure on the high seas

WONG NORMAN TAN/PHOTOS SIMON HUI



Tan Wearn Haw is no stranger to the transient state. He was been on the move ever since the age of eight, travelling throughout Europe and Asia to compete in sailing events, studying in France and England as a recipient of the Public Service Commission Scholarship, re-locating to Sydney to campaign and compete in the 2000 Olympic Games, as well as spending two years in Valencia, Spain, to prepare for the 32nd America's Cup. The constant uprooting and re-establishing has taught him to tackle challenges head on. "When you keep being thrown into foreign environments, you learn to adapt pretty fast," he said.

It comes as no surprise that, when asked about his recent appointment as co-skipper of the Super Maxi racing yacht known as the Audi Ultra (together with sailing legend Luddie Ingvall), Tan responded with the same can-do attitude: "It's all about helping people realise their dreams".

The Audi Ultra is a racing machine. Stepping on board this state-of-the-art boat you immediately become aware that there are no fancy trimmings or spacious sleeping quarters – everything is engineered to make this boat go fast. Very fast.

Tan, who sailed 22 days in the Audi Ultra from Sydney to Singapore, was in town as part of a pilot programme with the Singapore Sailing Federation (in which he is CEO) to turn young Singaporean sailors into world-class yachtsmen and women. The programme, which will run for four months, included leading a team of Singaporean sailors to Hong Kong to compete in the China Coast Week last month, before a second group is given

The Audi Ultra can sail as fast as a 1.5-ton sail-boat on a life vest and leave you!



Going out for a spin takes on new meaning.



With cramped quarters for this, it's a good thing there's a life raft!



Moored at Marina Bay in full view of all – talk about impetus to save up to buy a yacht!

"The Audi Ultra is a racing machine... everything is engineered to make this boat go fast. **Very fast!**"

a chance to sail alongside experienced international yachtsmen in the Phuket King's Cup in December.

"There's no better training than racing," enthused Tan. The long-term goal is for a full Singapore team to compete in the Sydney to Hobart race, and win it.

All his travelling (and inevitable disruption of his schooling) has led his friends to nickname him Peter Pan, the boy who refuses to grow up. In a time when his peers are all getting married and starting to have kids, Tan is still chalking up adventures on the high seas with his own gang of Lost Boys. But unlike the boastful and carefree Peter Pan, Tan is modest and unassuming. For a man that has accomplished so much at 32, he is refreshingly humble and credits his drive and success to his father who passed away before the age of 50. "It's taught me to live life with no regrets; to keep moving forward, to keep charging along," he said.

Growing up on the beach in the Changi area, Tan said he "upgraded from sandcastle building to sailing" because his dad was a sailor and he was excited by the prospect of finding new islands and hidden spots out in the ocean. Hence what started off as boyish dares to sail across small stretches of water to nearby islands quickly led to a slew of sailing titles and eventually the honour of representing Singapore at

the Sydney Olympics. The Games didn't go according to plan, however. Six months from the race, his racing partner was banned from competing and Tan was forced to sail with a new teammate. They finished second last.

Disillusioned and broke, Tan ventured into windsurfing. His eyes lit up when he talked of his three years away as a windsurfer; his love for the happy lifestyle, the quick decision making required to manoeuvre the waves, and the feel and balance on the board.

"It's very pure. I love the feel of the sand between my toes." But when the French came knocking on the door and invited him to return to sailing, Tan joined the Sino-French American Cup Challenger as a strategist and navigator. "It was an offer I could not refuse," he grinned.

Looking back at a career that has spanned 25 years, Tan said that the one thing that kept drawing him back to sailing is the community.

"You remember the people and the relationships you form with them," he recounted. "And it is this sense of belonging to a community that he wants to instill in the new generation of Singaporean sailors in his role as co-skipper of the Audi Ultra. "It's about bringing people together, and the teamwork and growth opportunities in sailing is the perfect way for me." ☐

Audi Ultra Super Maxi Racing Yacht

One of only seven Super Maxi yachts in the world, the Audi Ultra is considered a game changer in competitive sailboats because of its high sail to weight ratio and cutting (sweeping) keel. These features, together with numerous other design elements, provide the boat with increased stability and therefore greater horsepower to drive it through the water.

In conjunction with the Sailing Singapore Federation, the vessel has been brought to Singapore by its three owners – Thomas Zilliacus, Ben Croysey and Luddie Ingvall (former world-record holder, skipper and builder of the Audi Ultra) – to promote Big Boat Sailing in Singapore. Zilliacus and Croysey are co-founders of Yuzuzoo Corporation (Audi Ultra's second largest sponsor) which is currently the world's leading mobile media and mobile payment company.

You can follow the Audi Ultra in its races throughout Asia by joining the virtual crew on www.yuzuzoo.com

Designer: Simonis & Hoogland (Holland)

Builder: Concept Yachts (Australia)

Specifications: 30m long by 40m high, carbon fibre/nomex sandwich construction, with a net weight of 22 tonnes.